

**COMMENTS ON THE
VISUAL IMPACT REPORT
for the 101 HOV Gap Closure Project**

It appears that the DEIS/R and the Visual Impact Report (VIR) failed to adequately determine scenic and aesthetic impacts by a sensitive evaluation of the public's perception of existing resources.

While the reports capture many of visual impacts through the scenic San Rafael corridor (i.e. the unsightly soundwalls which do not blend in with the surrounding environment) there are many details and special features which were either underevaluated or ignored.

According to the VIR;

For the residents east of the highway, "the institutional style of architecture of the... sound wall disrupt(s) the visual pattern within the tree-covered residential community and hillside."

For highway motorist, "the length and monotony of the sound walls exacerbate the horizontal qualities of the highway itself, encroaching upon the natural qualities of the background landscaping and distant landforms."

However, these comments appear to conflict with the report's assertion that future "sound walls should be unified with the other sound walls within the projects limits by incorporating the same or related design elements."

It appears that future sound walls would only add to the monotony and the institutional appearance, exacerbate the horizontal qualities and further encroach upon the natural qualities of the background landscaping.

Even though the Visual Impact Report recommends landscaping wherever feasible, it fails to illustrate whether the landscaping would be adequate to mitigate the existing, as well as future, negative visual impacts which the report identifies.

The DEIS/R and the Visual Impact Report also failed to:

1) adequately illustrate the visual impacts of this project for homeowners above the walls. Home-owners on the hillsides, over-looking the freeway, will be significantly impacted when huge trees are removed and the homeowners will be able to see their neighbor's homes across the valley. Also, by relocating the noise barriers, a large number of residents will have a clear view of the freeway and the reflective sound walls which were not visible before the project. The Visual Impact Report fails to illustrate these visual impacts for the homeowners for the various alternatives.

2) clearly illustrate which trees will be removed and the extent of the visual impact from the loss of those trees for the various alternatives.

3) identify two noise barriers (S676 and S685) on Page 104 of the DEIS/R. They are not included in any other charts, maps or discussions.

4) provide a visual representation (from the southbound driver's point of view) of the noise barrier that juts out into the freeway near Linden Street for the Southbound Alternative.

5) illustrate the location of the existing noise barriers within the boundaries of the project. Without this information it is impossible to evaluate potential visual and noise impacts due to the cumulative effects of the parallel barriers. (NOTE: it is included in the VIR but has been left out of the DEIS/R. Since the VIUR is a separate document and not attached to the DEIS/R, the DEIS/R it is inadequate.)

6) adequately represent the "worst case" visual impacts of the various planned soundwalls for both the motorists and/or the homeowners impacted by the walls. There is one simulation for Brookdale area but it is not from the homeowner's perspective of those who will be living opposite the wall.

7) adequately describe or illustrate the visual impact for the homeowners located behind the proposed noise barriers No. S 517. It could block sunrise views over the bay. Also there is no visual representation of the wall from the drivers perspective. This could be a major visual impact for both the northbound and southbound driver because of the prominence of the noise barrier located next to the freeway.

8) provide an adequate description or visual representation (from the driver's point of view on the overpass or from the street below it of the noise barrier (S 596) located on the northbound overpass.

9) provide an adequate visual simulation for the 580/Irene overcross. The one provided is misleading because the perspective of frontage road on the right side has been altered so that the road and the surrounding properties appear to be significantly higher than they would be when the project is ultimately completed.

10) adequately describe or illustrate the visual impact for the noise barrier (S 457 & S 458) located along the Corte Madera Creek. The visual representations totally ignore the majestic views of Mount Tamalpais which would be obscured by concrete noise barriers.

Further, the DEIS/R and the VIR completely ignore the issue of graffiti on the sound walls in San Rafael which has been an ongoing and expensive maintenance problem for Caltrans. Caltrans' CALIFORNIA NOISE BARRIERS report from JUNE 1992 states: "Annual maintenance costs, where graffiti is a problem, can amount to ten percent of the initial construction costs. These costs are sapping resources that could otherwise be available for other transportation improvements, among them safety and congestion relief projects.

Special considerations should be given to deter the graffiti problem and the long term cost it incurs. Landscaping will in the long run provide greater mitigation for the dollar by reducing both the negative visual impacts of the walls and the graffiti problem on the walls. Landscaping will not only prevent graffiti, it will abate it.

A review of the Visual Impact Report with the public would go a long way towards identifying the visual impacts and best way to mitigate them.

DIANE

AS PER YOUR REQUEST
I'M SENDING MY COMMENTS
DIRECTLY TO YOU.

MANY THANKS

Scott Kaplan

SCOTT KAPLAN

SAN RAFAEL C. A.G.

217 Jewel St.

94901